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## **COUNTY COMPLAINTS OF FOODBORNE ILLNESS INCREASE WITH HEAT**

*Illnesses Could Be Common Stomach Ailment, Gastroenteritis*

(Phoenix)-- The Maricopa County Environmental Services Department has reported an increase in foodborne illness complaints since May 1 and says a stomach ailment called gastroenteritis may be the culprit in some cases. Rising temperatures and outdoor activities increase the chances of getting sick, but there are a few simple things Valley residents can do to stay healthy.

“Gastroenteritis is very easy to transmit, but it’s also very easy to prevent,” said Mike Williams, Foodborne Illness Coordinator. “Washing your hands is the best way to avoid getting sick from the thousands of things we touch each day,” Williams said.

Gastroenteritis is an irritation and inflammation of the digestive tract caused by viruses or bacteria that people can contract most commonly by:

- person-to-person contact, including touching door handles and faucet handles,
- bathing in lakes or streams,
- swallowing infected water, or
- eating contaminated or uncooked foods.

“Warm temperatures can speed up bacteria growth and, given the right circumstances, harmful bacteria can quickly multiply on food, causing people to get sick,” says David Ludwig, Environmental Health Division Manager. “You can fight this contagious illness by washing hands prior to preparing foods, eating, smoking, drinking, or doing anything that might get contamination into the mouth,” Ludwig said.

Symptoms can vary, but generally include:

- nausea,
- vomiting,
- diarrhea,
- head and body aches,
- low-grade fever, and
- stomach cramps or pain.

Illness begins within one to three days after contact and symptoms may begin suddenly, most commonly with stomach pain, or gradually within a few hours. It usually lasts one or two days with rapid recovery. This illness is usually not life threatening, except to the people who have weakened

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immune systems or are very young or old. Diagnosis of the exact cause of this illness can be difficult and is most often made by symptoms alone.

The best treatment is to rest and maintain fluid intake, guard against dehydration, and follow your physician's instructions for food intake. People who get sick and may be carriers should be extra careful about handling foods for at least two days after symptoms cease. This will help prevent spreading it to others.

Hot or cooked foods are rarely the sources of this illness because cooking destroys it. Since this illness has an onset time of about 24 hours and there are several means of transmission, it is unlikely that the last meal eaten was the source. However, proper handling of hot and cold food is always a good way to reduce the risk of getting sick. These simple steps will help:

- Wash hands and surfaces often.
- Separate raw and cooked foods; don't contaminate.
- Cook food to proper temperatures.
- Refrigerate food promptly.

If you think you are suffering from a foodborne illness or have questions about gastroenteritis, call your medical care provider for advice.

#### **About the Environmental Health Division**

The Environmental Health Division of the Maricopa County Environmental Services Department reviews and approves construction plans for food production facilities including: restaurants, grocery stores, processors, pet grooming establishments, hotels, boarding homes, supervised care homes and school cafeterias within Maricopa County. Environmental Health issues construction and operating permits, inspects establishments according to the Maricopa County Environmental Health Code (MCEHC) and manages other special programs related to foodborne illness outbreaks, education and training.